ADAPTIVE BIAS CURRENT CIRCUIT

AND METHOD FOR AMPLIFIERS

TECHNICAL FIELD

A general field of the invention is amplifiers. A particular field

5   of the invention is radio frequency (RF) amplifiers, e.g., amplifiers utilized in

handsets and other devices that receive and transmit RF signals and typically

use portable power supplies.

BACKGROUND ART

Efficient amplifiers are important for RF applications. A typical

10 RF device uses a portable power source, e.g., a battery. The operation of the

RF device is enhanced when the demand on the battery is reduced. The RF

circuits of a portable device, however, present one of biggest demands on the

power source of a portable device. In particular, the amplifiers in RF circuits

consume considerable power.

15   There are different methods of RF signal transmission. In some

methods, the information to be transmitted is completely coded in the phase of

the RF signals that are transmitted. GSM is an exemplary standard in which

the information to be transmitted is completely coded in the phase of the RF

signals. In other methods, at least some information is coded in the amplitude

20 of the RF signals. In the latter case, it is important to attempt to advance

conflicting goals in the design of the RF amplifier circuit. A first goal is high

average efficiency, which makes better use of the available power from a

power source. A second goal is high linearity, so that the amplifier does not

distort the information carrying amplitude signal. There are a number of

25 techniques and standards that use the RF amplitude for some or all of the

information carried by the RF signals.

Modern wireless data transmission methods are intended to

provide for high data rates, as the traffic carried on the RF signals includes

voice and bit heavy data traffic, ranging from text messaging to image data,

video data, and internet protocol data. The third generation (3G) wireless communication methods utilize spectrally efficient variable-envelope modulation schemes. One such scheme is the hybrid phase-shift keying (HPSK) scheme, which has been adopted for the wideband code division

5   multiple access (WCDMA) standard. In WDCMA spectral re-growth due to the transmitter circuit distortion is strictly limited. This often translates to stringent and challenging linearity requirements for the radio frequency (RF) amplifiers, which constitute the end of the transmitter chain and are tasked to handle the highest signal levels.

10   Another important, although conflicting, design criteria is the amplifier power consumption. Since RF amplifiers consume a significant share of battery power in a portable device, their power efficiencies have a direct and determining impact on the time period of device operations before a recharge or replacement of the power source, e.g., a battery, is required. Efficiency

15   should be maximized at the amplifier's peak power level without compromising the amplifier linearity. Additionally, however, efficiency should also be high during power back-off. Achieving efficiency during both conditions has proved difficult in practice. The WCDMA standard, for example, requires power control (attenuation) to be continuously and

20   adaptively enforced to achieve equalization of signals received by a base station irrespective of the distance from the base stations of handsets within the coverage zone of the base station. Thus, an RF amplifier should exhibit high average efficiency to prolong battery life. The amplifier's bias should be adaptive. For small signal conditions, the quiescent current should be kept to

25   its minimum to enhance the efficiency. For large signal conditions, the current should automatically rise such that high linearity is achieved.

Class AB (or B) bias is traditionally employed in RF amplifiers to provide an adaptive bias current. There are various types of amplifiers that achieve adaptive bias current. One type of amplifier is commonly referred to

30   as inductor base bias feed amplifier. In this circuit, an inductor is coupled between the base of an output transistor and the output of a current bias circuit.

A variation is the self base bias control circuit, which adds a current mirror for feedback in the current bias circuit to increase the current multiplication effect. The current mirror feedback variation (self base bias control) of the inductor base bias feed amplifier is discussed in Shinjo, et al, "Low Quiescent Current SiGe HBT Driver Amplifier Having Self Base Bias Control Circuit," IEICE Trans. Electron., vol. E85-C, no. 7, pp. 1404-1411, July 2002.

Recognized problems with these and other amplifier circuits using inductors include the amount of real estate occupied by the inductors. Resistors, typically a small amount of polysilicon, take up far less space than inductors. A resistor base bias feed circuit omits inductors, but the backward impedance requirement of the circuit requires high value resistors. However, as the base current of the output transistor increases, so does the voltage drop across the resistor connected to the base of the output transistor. Any increase in the base current of the common-emitter amplifier thus causes a voltage drop at the base. The subsequent base-emitter voltage (V_{be}) reduction at large signal conditions greatly limits the current boost. The higher the resistor value (good for the impedance requirement), the more the bias circuit resembles a constant-current bias (where the collector current could not rise as power input (P_{in}) increases).

A variation of the resistor base bias feed adds an additional current bias circuit to feed current into the base of the output transistor. The dual bias circuit with resistor base bias is discussed in Taniguchi et al. "A Dual Bias-Feed Circuit Design for SiGe HBT Low-Noise Linear amplifier," IEEE Trans. Microwave Theory Tech., vol. 51, no.2, pp. 414-421, Feb. 2003.

To achieve linearity, resistor degeneration is used, but at the expense of amplifier gain. A resistor is connected to the emitter of the output transistor. In this circuit configuration, the emitter resistor raises the voltage at the emitter of the output transistor, thereby reducing the base-emitter voltage drop (V_{BE}), and, accordingly, the current boost effects of the above-mentioned bias schemes. Inductor degeneration avoids raising the emitter voltage, but, as

mentioned above, inductors present fabrication problems due to the amount of real estate required to accommodate inductors.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

5   The invention provides an adaptive bias method and circuits for amplifiers that provide a substantial current boost at least partly based upon a sensed input power of an amplifier circuit. Methods and circuits of the invention provide an additional bias current based upon the sensed input power. Circuits of the invention may be simple, area-efficient, low-power, stable and

10   digitally-programmable. In addition, methods and circuits of the invention may be used with a number of amplifier circuit configurations, including amplifiers having either inductor and/or resistive degeneration.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

         FIG. 1 is a block diagram of an adaptively biased amplifier

15   circuit in accordance with an embodiment of the invention;

         FIG. 2 is a block diagram of the adaptive bias current boost block in FIG. 1;

         FIG. 3 is an adaptive bias current circuit in accordance with an embodiment of the invention; and

20   FIG. 4 illustrates one half of an exemplary multi-stage RF amplifier in accordance with an embodiment of the invention.

BEST MODE OF CARRYING OUT THE INVENTION

         Embodiments of the invention provide an input power based current boost to the bias circuit of an RF amplifier. In preferred embodiments

25   of the invention, a differential transistor pair senses the input power difference of the positive and negative input voltages of an RF amplifier. As input power to the differential RF amplifier increases, the output current of the differential transistor pair clips, providing for high average current responsive to the level of input power. The differential transistors are biased with low quiescent

current, so that their collector currents will be clipped during large-signal conditions, thus raising their average (dc) collector currents above the quiescent level. A low pass filter removes harmonics, and a current boost ΔI that is proportional to the input power is produced. This current boost is provided to the bias circuit of the RF amplifier. Preferably, one or more current mirrors, including a digitally programmable current mirror are provided to multiple the current boost ΔI provided to the RF amplifier bias circuit. Extra dc current, which is proportional to the input power, is applied to the RF amplifier through the digitally-programmable bias current mirror network.

Adaptive bias circuits of the invention are applicable to different types of RF amplifiers. The bias circuits of the invention may be used to counteract the effective of resistor degeneration. A preferred embodiment RF amplifier circuit of the invention uses resistor degeneration, with a resistor connected to the emitter of the output transistor. A current boost bias circuit senses the input power, and provides a current boost to maintain an efficient, increasing adaptive bias current with rising input power. The V_{BE} base-emitter voltage for amplification at the output transistor is maintained while the resistive degeneration provides for linearity.

Preferred embodiments will now be discussed with reference to the figures. From the description of the preferred embodiments, artisans will understand broader aspects of the invention. Artisans will also appreciate that the adaptive bias circuits and methods of the invention are applicable generally to RF amplifier circuits of the class AB/B variety, as the principles of the invention may be used to provide both high average efficiency and high linearity.

FIG. 1 illustrates an exemplary embodiment RF amplifier. In FIG. 1, a bias circuit 10 provides bias current I_{cq1} to an output amplifier 12, including a positive output 12_P and a negative output 12_N. An adaptive bias current circuit 14 senses the input power differential between the positive and negative voltages V_{IP} and V_{IN} of the RF amplifier and provides a current boost of $\Delta I_{cq} + I_{env}(t)$, where I_{cq} is the quiescent current provided to the adaptive bias

current circuit 14. The dc portion ΔI_{cq} of the current boost will be discussed first, while the envelope current $I_{env}(t)$ is also advantageously provided by preferred embodiment circuits and will be discussed below. The dc current boost ΔI_{cq} is proportional to the input power and is provided to the bias circuit

5   10 to increase the quiescent current in response to rising input power. Though not shown in FIG. 1, the current boost can be used to counter the effect of resistor degeneration if a resistor is applied to the emitter of the transistor of the output amplifier 12. FIG. 1 shows that the adaptive bias current circuit 14 receives positive and negative input voltages. These voltages can be accepted,

10   for example, via a single input (if relative to a ground potential or other reference potential) or via a differential input including two inputs.

Referring now to FIG. 2, the general features of a preferred embodiment adaptive bias current circuit 14 are illustrated. A differential sensor 16 senses the input power difference of the positive and negative input

15   voltages V_{IP} and V_{IN} of the amplifier 12. The sensor 16, preferably implemented as a differential transistor pair, produces a current proportional to the input power difference. As input power to the differential RF amplifier increases, the output current of the sensor 16 provides a high average current responsive to the level of input power during large input power conditions. A

20   low pass filter 18 removes harmonics, and a current boost $\Delta I_{cq} + I_{env}(t)$ that is proportional to the input power is provided to a current multiplier 20, e.g., a current mirror, that increases the level of current boost by a multiplication factor. A programmable current multiplier 22 provides an additional current boost. The total multiplication factor may be termed KN, where K is a constant

25   of the multiplier 20 and N is the multiplication factor of the multiplier 22, in which case the multiplication factor is $KN(\Delta I_{cq} + I_{env}(t))$. This current boost is provided to the bias circuit 24 of the RF amplifier. The bias circuit 24 therefore receives extra dc current, which is proportional to the input power, and envelope current. The envelope current $I_{env}(t)$ is provided in preferred

30   embodiment adaptive bias current circuits of the invention on top of the dc current ΔI_{cq}. Assuming a two-tone sinusoidal input at frequencies ω_1 and ω_2,

the envelope signal is given by $I_{env}(t) = I_{env} \cos[(\omega_2 - \omega_1)t + \Theta_{env}]$, where I_{env} and Θ_{env} respectively denote the amplitude and phase of the envelope signal. The amplitude of the envelope signal can be changed by the programmable current multiplier 22 and the quiescent current value, and the low pass filter 18 determines phase of the envelope signal. The phase and the amplitude of the envelope signal may be controlled to cancel the third harmonic of the RF amplifier. See, e.g. V. Leung, J. Deng, P. Gudem and L. Larson, "Analysis of Envelope Signal Injection for Improvement of RF Amplifier Intermodulation Distortion," Proc. IEEE Custom Integrated Circuit Conf., pp. 133-136, Oct. 2004.

FIG. 3 illustrates a preferred embodiment adaptive current bias and amplifier circuit that provides an adaptive current bias current for supplying extra current bias to a RF amplifier bias circuit 25. Low quiescent current is provided by a quiescent current bias supply circuit 26 to a differential transistor sensor 28, including differential transistors Q_1 and Q_2, that senses the differential input signals V_{ip} and V_{in} for the RF amplifier through two capacitors (C_1, C_2). The capacitors C_1 and C_2 should have small values (e.g. 50 fF). The values of the capacitors C_1 and C_2 should be selected to minimize loading to the RF amplifier to which the adaptive current bias circuit is connected.

Signal detection is accomplished by two bipolar transistors (Q_1, Q_2) in the differential transistor 28. The transistors Q_1 and Q_2 configured as common-emitter amplifiers. The transistors Q_1 and Q_2 are preferably biased with very low quiescent current (e.g., $20\mu A$). The quiescent current bias is selected to minimize power consumption while also providing a sufficient level of current boost for amplification. With a low quiescent current bias, the collector current of the transistors Q_1 and Q_2 will clip easily and drastically during large signal conditions that occur during normal operation of the RF amplifier. The predetermined level of input signal conditions that trigger clipping is a design choice that may be determined by artisans who will be able to determine transistor sizes, the quiescent current and other circuit component

values that are appropriate for a particular design choice implementing the invention.

When the power level is reached where clipping occurs, the average current (I_{ave}), or the dc part of the clipped currents, will rise above the quiescent current level (I_{cq}). That is, $I_{ave} = I_{cq} + \Delta I$. The higher the signal level, the bigger the resulting average current. The collector currents I_{Q1}, I_{Q2} are summed by a current summer 30.

Notice that the two collector currents (I_{Q1}, I_{Q2}) are differential in nature. While having the same average current, their (RF) signal components are 180° out of phase. Therefore, when the two currents are summed at the drain of a transistor M_1, the signal part is eliminated. The current of M_1 (I_{M1}) then contains twice the average current. In summary, I_{M1} is proportional to the input signal level.

When such heavy current clipping occurs, a host of harmonic and intermodulation distortion components are generated. Signal combinations at the drain of M_1 would remove, to the first order, all even-order distortions. However, odd-order harmonic components will remain (with the dc component, I_{ave}). If I_{M1} is directly fed back to an RF amplifier to supplement its quiescent current (I_{cq1}), the distortion components will modulate with the RF signal and degrade the amplifier linearity performances. A low pass filter 32 removes distortion components that can lead to degradation of the linearity performance of the amplifier.

Low-pass filtering is carried out on the current I_{M1} by a single pole located between the gates of M_1 and M_2. The values of R_{lp} and C_{lp} are selected such that the pole frequency is low enough to provide sufficient rejection of the distortion components. However, if the pole frequency is set too low, the average current will not respond fast enough with the signal envelope, defeating the purpose of the adaptive bias control. In an exemplary embodiment WCDMA amplifier that we simulated where the signal bandwidth is about 5MHz, the pole was set at 1.4MHz (with R_{lp} = 18KΩ, C_{lp} = 6.4pF). Simulations and experiments confirmed a good compromise between good

distortion removal and fast envelope tracking. These parameters and considerations can be used to select an appropriate pole frequency and values for the resistance and capacitance in the low pass filter.

5   After the low-pass filtering, I_{M1} is mirrored to the drain of M_2 with a 1:1 ratio. The quiescent current ($2I_{cq}$) is subtracted at the collector of Q_3. The resulting current is delivered to a current mirror 34, particularly to the collector of transistor Q_4. The Q_4 collector current, I_{Q4}, equals $2I_{ave} - 2I_{cq} = 2\Delta I$. At this point, a dc current (I_{Q4}) has been obtained which is directly proportional to the amplifier input level P_{in}. The current is based upon the

10   detected signal of the input power, and may be added directly to boost bias circuit, or more preferably, be further multiplied to provide additional current boost.

       Current multiplication is provided in two stages in the example embodiment of FIG. 3. The current mirror 34 provides a constant ratio current

15   multiplication. Specifically, the current I_{Q4} is mirrored by Q_4 and Q_5. In the example embodiment, the current mirror ratio of 1:4 will magnify the current boost effects of the power detector control bias on the RF amplifier for a given input level. Transistor pair M_3-M_4 will then reverse the direction of the current flow, and deliver the dc current to supplement the quiescent current (Icq1) at

20   the bias circuit 25 of the RF amplifier.

       A second current multiplication is provided by a programmable current mirror 36. The mirror ratio between M_3 and M_4 is digitally programmable. This allows flexibility and controllability to the current boosting effects on the amplifier to account for process and temperature

25   variations. As an example, the total transistor size of M_4 may be eight times bigger than that of M_3. Depending on a 2-bit digital control, therefore, either 8, 6, 4, and 0 units of M_4 can be disconnected. Thus, the mirror ratio can be digitally programmed to be either 1:0 (which effectively disables the power detector control circuit), or progressively increase to 1:2, 1:4 or 1:8. In

30   summary, the example embodiment adaptive bias current circuit (where the mirror 34 has a 1:4 ratio and the transistor size of M_4 is eight times that of M_3)

can supplement the quiescent current of the RF amplifier by 0, 16, 32 or 64 times I_{Q4}, where I_{Q4} is proportional to P_{in}. Since current boost is not dependent on the amplifier base current or the output power, there is no feedback, and the adaptive bias circuit and method is inherently stable. The circuit consumes

5   little power with a low quiescent current bias and is compact for implementation in a semiconductor fabrication.

The adaptive bias output of the FIG. 3 circuit is labeled Bias1 in FIG. 4, and is used as the bias current supply for an example embodiment two stage amplifier shown in FIG. 4. FIG. 4 illustrates one half of an amplifier

10   circuit for simplicity, while artisans will appreciate another identical half of the circuit would produce the opposite phase of output power. The FIG. 4 circuit is a suitable circuit, for example for a low-power driver amplifier for a WCDMA mobile phone transmitter applications.

The amplifier is a two-path two-stage single-ended design. FIG.

15   4 shows one path of the amplifier. The other path is unshown, but is identical and produces the opposite phase of output power. The first stage is a cascode amplifier 38 that supplies a variable gain. The amount of variable gain is determined by the level of a control voltage V_{ctrl}. The cascode amplifier 38 includes a degeneration resistor 40 to provide linearity. The second stage is a

20   common-emitter amplifier 42. The common emitter amplifier provides power match and includes a degeneration inductor 44 for linearity. Bias1, provided by the example embodiment FIG. 3 circuit adaptively adjusts current consumption to achieve good linearity performance for large signal conditions, and maintains high efficiency during power back-off. Bias2 can be, for

25   example, a normal class AB/B bias circuit. Alternatively, it could be an adaptive bias circuit of the invention where the voltage inputs would be the output voltages of the cascade amplifier 38. The bias circuit providing Bias1 and the bias circuit providing Bias2 is shared by the second path of the amplifier (separate bias circuits are not required for the second path that

30   produces the opposite phase of output power). The FIG. 4 implementation is an example, and artisans will recognize that the method by which the FIG. 3

adaptive current bias circuit provides an adaptive bias circuit can be applied to other class AB/B amplifier circuits. Artisans will particularly appreciate the general applicability of the principals of the invention to other types of RF amplifiers.

5   Methods for providing adaptive bias currents and adaptive bias current circuits of the invention provide current boost to supplement the quiescent current of RF amplifiers at high power levels. Circuits of the invention may be implemented as low-power, compact, and digitally programmable implementations, and their performance is inherently stable.

10 The adaptive bias circuits of the invention can provide Class AB/B-style bias on an amplifier with resistor degeneration.

While specific embodiments of the present invention have been shown and described, it should be understood that other modifications, substitutions and alternatives are apparent to one of ordinary skill in the art.

15 Such modifications, substitutions and alternatives can be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention, which should be determined from the appended claims.

Various features of the invention are set forth in the appended claims.